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AUTHOR	Oxley, Diana; Croninger, Robert G.; DeGroot, Elisabeth
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ABSTRACT

High schools organized into schools-within-schools (SWS) have the capacity to create social capital, a sense of trust and connection among teachers and students that can be used in the service of teaching and learning. These differentiated social groupings, or subunits, can influence members' sense of identity during the transition to high school, and may be especially important not only to the success of individual students but also to the success of the SWS structure. Social capital and identity are examined during students' entry year in four high schools with an SWS structure. It is argued that SWS designs that consider students' needs in the areas of social relations and identity have a greater potential for success than those that do not. Data were obtained through focus groups and individual interviews with staff and students in two or more subunits as well as school-level administrative staff. Findings indicate that social capital and identity formation appear to be mutually enhancing processes. An appendix provides a description of the larger study, including schools-within-schools high schools, their subunits, and research methods. (Contains 22 references.) (DFR)

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Considerations for Entry Level Students in Schools-Within-Schools: The Interplay of Social Capital and Student Identity Formation

Diana Oxley
University of Oregon

Robert G. Croninger
University of Maryland

Elisabeth DeGroot
University of Michigan

D. Oxley

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Considerations for Entry Level Students in Schools-Within-Schools:
The Interplay of Social Capital and Student Identity Formation

A basic premise of organizing high schools into schools-within-schools (SWS) is that this organizational form has the capacity to create social capital, a sense of trust and connection among teachers and students that can be used in the service of teaching and learning. The idea that SWSs also play a role in students' identity development, a key task during adolescence, has not received attention. Yet the sub-units in SWS high schools often organize their staff and students around different courses of study or curriculum themes that develop differing reputations and even personalities. Such differentiated social groupings have the potential to influence members' sense of identity in important ways. Research shows that students confront significant social and academic challenges as well as opportunities upon entry to high school. How these sub-units operate to facilitate social capital and identity formation during the transition to high school may be especially important not only to the success of individual students but also to the success of the SWS structure.

In this paper we examine social capital and identity during students' entry year in four high schools with an SWS structure. We present data on the shape that SWS organization takes at entry levels across the study schools; on staff's and students' perceptions of their own and other sub-units; and about students' relationships with staff and peers during the entry year. We also examine these transition-year phenomena in light of district-level practices related to articulation between lower school levels and high school. We argue that SWS designs that consider students' needs in both the areas of social relations and identity have a greater potential for success than those that do not.

Influence of SWS Organization on Social Capital

Research as well as theory suggest that small unit organization of schools has a favorable effect on relationships among teachers and students. Studies of school size conducted over the last several decades provide indirect evidence of such effects. Researchers found that smaller schools were associated with lower dropout rates (Pittman & Haughwout, 1987), higher attendance (Lindsay, 1982), greater participation in activities (Barker & Associates, 1978; Lindsay, 1982), and less behavioral disorder (Gottfredson, 1985). Researchers accounted for these effects through theories that relate small organization size to greater social familiarity, shared norms, and values (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988) and enhanced importance/acceptance of all individuals including marginal members (Barker & Associates, 1978).

Studies of small unit organization in middle and high schools provide more direct evidence that small units enhance social relationships. In two studies researchers compared small units to larger, unrestructured parts of the school. In a third, the researcher conducted cross-school analyses of small units that varied with respect to level of implementation. Like the small units in the former studies, high-implementation sub-units in the latter study were those in which students took at least four core academic classes with teachers and students in their sub-unit. Low-implementation sub-units were organized around only 1-2 classes. Study findings indicated that students in the small and high-implementation units knew and got along better with peers (Oxley, 1990; 1997), were more involved in school activities (Felner & Adan, 1988; Oxley, 1990, 1997), and received greater teacher support (Felner & Adan, 1988). Further, teachers knew and interacted with more students in more diverse roles and contexts (Oxley, 1990; 1997). In another study, students in schools organized into smaller units, in this case

teacher-student groups of 60-240, exhibited fewer behavioral problems than students in schools without such organization (Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand & Flowers, 1997).

Interest in the capacity of SWS organization to create social capital is based on the idea that trust, belonging, and shared norms are important conditions for learning (Lee & Croninger, 1998). The research evidence is generally consistent with this proposition. Research on the relationship between school size and achievement has produced mixed findings, but a recent analysis of a large, national sample of schools found that smaller high schools were associated with greater gains in scores on standardized tests taken between 8th and 12th grade (Lee & Smith, 1997). Studies of small units also found students in those that departed from traditional organization posted better grades (Felner & Adan, 1988; Oxley, 1990; 1997) and standardized test scores (Felner et al, 1997).

Potential Influence of SWSs on Student Identity

According to developmental theorists, identity formation is a key task of adolescence (Kroger, 1996). By secondary school age, students have gained the cognitive ability to reflect on themselves and often experience keen self-consciousness, and they have begun to interact with wider, more diverse social groups at greater remove from family and neighborhood (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan & MacIver, 1993). These are the conditions that permit adolescents to explore and experiment with different roles and interests and later to achieve more sustained commitments and identifications (Steinberg, 1999).

Social context exerts a powerful influence on identity development. Forging an identity is a social process in which the other people with whom adolescents interact convey information about who he or she is or ought to be. Adolescents choose with what elements of their environment they will identify. At the same time the social context constrains the range of

possible identities that adolescents may adopt and values some more than others (Kroger, 1993; Steinberg, 1999). How adolescents resolve questions of identity rests in large part on their opportunities to explore different interests and roles without having to adopt an identity prematurely.

In the first year of high school students encounter a new social environment in which they are unknown to teachers and many peers and at a stage when their identity is formative. High school represents both an opportunity to develop in new or continuing directions and also the risk of being perceived in terms limited to ethnicity or academic competence. The larger size of high schools (Simmons & Blyth, 1987) and the tendency of secondary school teachers to use less individualized instruction and to base assessment of student progress on social comparisons increase the latter risk (Eccles et al., 1993).

At the same time, the expanded curricular offerings and social groups that usually exist in high schools afford opportunities to explore interests and make new friends. SWS organization represents a powerful vehicle for molding curriculum and social groupings. Sub-units based on different curricular and instructional approaches may enable students to select one that matches and allows them to cultivate their interests and learning styles. Such sub-units likely provide a supportive social environment in which staff and students with shared interests and values guide and reinforce one another's exploration and development. These similar others can provide valued feedback and reflections that strengthen students' sense of who they are and what they want.

Wexler (1992) found that students in schools characterized by a "social interactional lack" struggled, often unsuccessfully, to achieve a positive social identity or constructed identities that were in defense against or at odds with the school values. These social relational

deficits were fed to varying extents by a teacher professionalism that devalued social relationships with students or by social class differences among teachers and students that increased social distances. Under these conditions students sought to magnify similarities shared with some peers, and inner city students in particular tried to overcome a negative identity by fighting peers to redress slights and/or by rejecting school.

To the extent that sub-units not only facilitate positive social relationships among teachers and students but also match students' and teachers' interests and goals, students' may explore their interests and new roles and are more likely to experience affirmation of them. Students' desires for academic learning and identity may dovetail.

Role of SWSs in Social Capital and Identity Formation at Entry Level Year

Adaptation to high school poses a significant challenge to many incoming students. Research has shown that student achievement, attendance, and self-esteem tend to drop after high school entry (Felner & Adan, 1988; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Researchers have pointed out that students' established social networks are disrupted at high school entry. Students encounter new teachers and new peers, often without the comfort of old friends. Moreover, incoming students are unfamiliar with their new schools' expectations, rules, and procedures. Thus, demands to learn new ways of behaving and interacting with others are highest when students feel most insecure in high school.

In addition, the relatively large and inclusive entering class of students challenges established school practices. Structures and routines that seem to work at higher grade levels, with students whose needs and abilities are better known and whose ranks have already been reduced through attrition, may not meet the needs of entering students as well. In urban high schools, where incoming 9th grade classes can represent more than a third of school enrollment,

this challenge is especially imposing. The entry of large numbers of unknown students, many of whom have poor academic skills, may threaten a high school's mission of graduating students, established practices, and existing stocks of social capital.

Education researchers have developed different strategies to address the needs of new high school students. These strategies include organization of staff and entering students into small groups and increased guidance (Felner & Adan, 1988). More recently a group of researchers has developed a SWS model (Talent Development High School) that incorporates transitional sub-units (Jordan, McPartland, Legters & Balfanz, 1999). In this model, upper-grade level students enter sub-units organized around careers, and entering students are assigned to separate, entry-grade level sub-units. The transitional units are subdivided into interdisciplinary teacher teams each of which shares a group of students in common. Designed for inner-city schools admitting large numbers of students who are academically at-risk, the Talent Development Model also employs special curricula that allow for intensified instruction in fewer areas, remediation, and social skill building.

Both intervention strategies have yielded positive effects on attendance and achievement (Felner & Adan, 1988; McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan & Legters, 1998) in large part through restructuring the social environment for incoming students. At the same time these strategies raise questions about how programs designed especially for entry-level students influence identity formation and opportunities to acquire social capital. In these programs, teachers get to know students better but without benefit of multi-year contact and shared interests and preferences in teaching styles; and entering students are cut off from older, academically successful peers. In addition, where staff view entry level students as threats to the

organizational integrity of other sub-units, membership in these sub-units may even convey negative identities.

SWS plans that accommodate entering students in cross-grade sub-units also raise questions about how these students acquire social capital and forge identity. Most SWS plans induct students directly into cross-grade level units, but units can be differentiated on a variety of bases with different implications for social capital and identity. Research suggests that plans that influence both social relationships and identity formation in positive ways may have the greatest benefits for entering students. Research has not explored, however, how entering students actually characterize their social relationships within and across sub-units, what qualities they attribute to their sub-unit and its members, and what kinds of barriers to valued relationships and positive identity exist. In this study we use students' and staff's own words to explore such questions.

Research Methods

The present study is part of a larger research project that afforded the opportunity to investigate social capital and identity among entry level students in four schools with different SWS plans. Although the larger study encompassed five high schools, the present study is limited to four schools: Taylor, Grant, Harrison, and Adams. The fifth school, Monroe, initially admitted students as 7th and 8th graders and did not extend to the 12th grade and admit 9th graders as entry level students until the second year of our study. Thus the context of school entry in Monroe was very different from the other schools and did not permit us to make a straightforward comparison. For this reason, we have omitted Monroe from our analysis. In three of the schools included in the present analysis, students entered as 9th graders, and in a fourth, as 10th graders.

One of the express purposes of the larger study was to investigate social capital in relation to SWS structure. In addition, we had the broader goal of identifying emergent themes that cut across staff and student experiences in sub-units in each school. These themes became the focus of our second round of data collection. The extreme difficulty posed by entering students in some schools but not others emerged as a theme and suggested that we examine entry level year in SWS high schools in greater detail. Additional details about the design of the larger study including descriptions of the study schools, their sub-units, and the data collection methods we used are provided in the Appendix.

The purpose of this study is to describe the different forms that SWS plans take for entering students and to document staff and student experiences and perceptions related to the entry year. Data about SWS structures and practices and students' social relationships and identity were obtained through focus groups and individual interviews with staff and students in two or more sub-units as well as school-level administrative staff in each school. For each sub-unit we studied, we interviewed the sub-unit coordinator, several teachers, and students. In most cases, we conducted separate focus groups for entry-level and upper-grades students with approximately 6-8 students in each group. We asked staff and students about the nature of teacher-student and student-student relationships in their sub-unit. We derived data about student identity from inquiries about staff's and students' perceptions of their sub-unit including the staff and students in the sub-unit as well as the academic program offered.

We recorded and transcribed all interviews. These transcriptions, augmented by written accounts of shadowing students across their classes and school documents, served as the chief source of our data. Our analyses drew on our observations of general patterns of staff's and students' interview responses and their linkages with sub-unit structures and practices. Where

we identified interview data that were idiosyncratic but insightful, we indicate the limited basis of the data.

Findings

Students' and staff's perceptions and experiences in high schools with sub-units indicate that entering students present serious challenges to sub-unit members. Sub-unit structures and practices contribute in varying degrees to the formation of social capital among entering students; such practices have both negative and positive effects on students' identity formation. More specifically, the utility of social capital to students depends in critical ways upon the messages about student identity that the sub-units convey. We report our findings in three sections: entry-level challenges, strategies staff used to deal with them, and the interplay between social capital and identity in students' first year in high school sub-units. Table 1 displays basic features and characteristics of each school and its SWS structure.

Entry-level Challenges

Challenges to students and teachers. Entry-level challenges were most pronounced in the two large urban schools we studied, schools that also enroll large numbers of low-achieving students: Taylor and Grant High Schools. A sub-unit head summarized the problem at Grant High School:

> *The health* (sub-unit) *attracts a higher caliber student, but half my 9th grade, more than half my 9th grade is failing so I don't want to say I'm succeeding. At the 9th grade level none of us is succeeding any better than anybody else. I don't think there are any of us that are succeeding with our 9th graders. .... When I have to take in all these kids that don't really want me that come from the neighborhood schools that are ill prepared, I do no better with them than anybody else.* (Health sub-unit head, Grant High School)

Interestingly, staff in the four schools described new students in similar terms, irrespective of whether students were 9th or 10th graders. Harrison High School, for example,

serves students in grades 10-12. Consequently incoming students are older and perhaps more mature relative to those at Grant, Taylor, and Adams High Schools. Yet, Harrison teachers considered their sophomores as different from other students, often needing more structure and a different kind of teacher. A Harrison teacher reflected on her colleagues' unsuccessful efforts to create cross-grade classes:

> *...I kept saying –coming from the junior high –... "They're a different, they're a whole different world, sophomores." Oh, no, they wanted to teach all the kids, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, all together in classes that were all mixed. And you know, all these really wonderful ideas. And I said, "Sophomores cannot handle this, sophomores cannot handle this," you know. And they just didn't get that until they taught sophomores, and sophomores drove 'em nuts.* (Arts/Humanities sub-unit teacher, Harrison High School)

A Harrison history teacher who taught primarily 10th grade students concurred:

> *And sophomore level, right. Especially at this time of the year* (early fall) *they take a lot of guidance. They're still on trying to shift from junior high to high school ....* (Arts/ Humanities sub-unit teacher, Harrison High School)

Such comments are similar to those offered by teachers in high schools where 9th grade was the entry-point for students. Like the Harrison teachers, these teachers described entering 9th grade students as "immature", "needy", and requiring additional care and guidance. Compare the comments of two Taylor teachers to their Harrison counterparts:

> *And they* (older and younger students) *do not need to be mixed like that. They really don't. It's two different worlds. And our 9th graders are babies this year.* (Ninth grade sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

> *They have to feel part of something. That's very important, especially for 9th graders who are very immature. .... Especially inner city kids, if they don't feel some possession, they will not connect, and a lot of our kids come from very disconnected families...* (Social studies department head, Taylor High School)

Although developmental levels undoubtedly influence these attributions, so too do the special challenges associated with socializing large numbers of new students into existing organizational structures, behavioral norms, and routine practices. Teachers in the three study

schools with 9-12 grades characterized the initial two-years of high school as an important transitional period. Teachers talked about getting students "over the hump" and saw these early entry difficulties as reflective of students' developmental stage *and* need to adjust to high school routines and expectations:

> *You can save most of them* (entering 9th grade students), *if you can get them past the 10th grade*." (Ninth grade sub-unit teacher, Taylor High School)

> ... *I don't think kids are mature enough in 9th and 10th grade to be able to handle it all. I think they're ready in 11th and 12th.* (International/Cooperative Learning guidance counselor, Adams High School.)

Special challenges in SWS high schools. Transition to high school poses challenges to staff and students, especially in urban settings. However, SWS structure presents its own special opportunities and challenges for entry level students. The smaller size of sub-units can provide entering students additional support and guidance, but sub-units based on differing courses of study or themes require students first to determine an appropriate sub-unit membership. In large, comprehensive high schools, 9th grade students may also be distributed across programs (for example, curricular tracks, academic support programs, guidance counselors, or homerooms), however, these placements do not require the level of individual commitment or identification assumed by membership in a specific sub-unit. In other words, SWS structure raises two entry-level issues: the transition from a lower school level to high school and the transition from a lower school level to a specific sub-unit.

The importance of this special challenge was highlighted by a Harrison teacher. After reflecting on past experiences at the school, and comparing these experiences to more traditionally structured high schools in the district, she said:

> *I have a hard time seeing myself in a school where I would, maybe as a counselor, be working with A through F. You know, like what is A through F? You know, it's not a*

> *meaningful grouping. And it doesn't do anything to promote community or connectiveness.* (Health/Human Services teacher, Harrison High School)

Staff of SWS high schools must organize entering students who are largely unknown to teachers and administrators into "meaningful groupings," that is, groupings that "promote community." This poses a unique challenge to SWS high schools. How successfully teachers and administrators address this challenge can have important consequences for the success of individual students and for the SWS reforms.

Three Entry-Level Strategies

We grouped the four study high schools according to the strategies they use to ease entering students' transitional difficulties and to form meaningful groupings. Each strategy must strike a balance between addressing a) entering students' individual needs for support and guidance and b) an organizational need to distribute students among sub-units. The manner in which the schools strike this balance varies. We identified three strategies: (1) the creation of a separate, transitional sub-unit (Taylor High School); (2) immediate induction into sub-units based on choice (Grant and Harrison high schools); and (3) immediate induction into sub-units based on choice and having a transitional emphasis (Adams High School).

Transitional sub-unit, postponed induction. Taylor 9th grade staff and students are organized into two separate, entry-year-only sub-units. The sub-unit design followed the Talent Development model (Jordan, McPartland, Legters & Balfanz, 1999), with first-year students grouped alphabetically into one of two equivalent sub-units. Within sub-units incoming 9th grade students are assigned to interdisciplinary teacher teams; each team shared a group of 150-180 students in common for instruction. Transitional sub-units were located in one wing of the building, separate from other sub-units. Sub-unit entrances are closely watched by staff and hall

monitors to minimize student traffic between the transitional and upper-grade sub-units.

The 9th grade sub-unit offered a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science, history, and foreign language. The 9th grade curriculum provides remediation in math and reading for low-achieving students; electives such as gym and music are taken in the upper grade sub-units. Teams also offer a course devoted to student socialization and transition to the upper-grade, career-focused sub-units. In this class, students identify their career interests and learn about the upper grade sub-unit programs through presentations and tours. In the spring of their 9th grade year, students choose one of four sub-units, Arts/Humanities, Business, Health/Human Services, or Mechanical/Aeronautical Engineering, to attend. Typically, students received their first choice for sub-unit membership.

Taylor's 9th grade sub-units were designed to provide students with a safe and supportive environment in which to *"learn how to do school."* Taylor's strategy for grouping students postpones induction into its career-based sub-units for one year as a means to inform students about sub-unit membership and to better prepare them to succeed in higher level courses. However, many students drop out after 9th grade or have to repeat 9th grade courses.

Immediate induction into sub-units based on choice. A more common strategy is immediate induction into theme-based, cross-grade sub-units upon entry. Both Grant and Harrison require students to have applied for (and been admitted to) sub-unit membership before starting high school. Such decisions usually determine sub-unit membership for the rest of high school, although students may request to transfer to another sub-unit. Grant has five sub-units that entering 9th graders can choose from, each with a specific career/subject area orientation: Arts, Business, Health, Communications, Law/African-American Culture. Harrison's 10th

graders choose from four, also organized around careers and subject areas: Arts/Humanities, International Business, Health/Human Services, and Science/Technology.

Grant students apply to the sub-units as 8th graders in the city's middle schools. High school representatives present information about their sub-units to 8th graders who attend an annual high school fair. Sub-unit heads make presentations at area middle schools and also actively recruit 8th graders from more distant middle schools with better reputations. All the city's comprehensive high schools have adopted the SWS design, and students may apply to any of the sub-units. Students are automatically accepted to sub-units in high schools in their catchment area but may have to meet selective admissions criteria in others. Grant's sub-units use modest criteria to screen out students with extremely poor records of achievement and attendance.

Incoming 10th grade students enter Harrison from a small number of feeder junior high schools. By school district policy students attend the high school located in their geographic zone. Harrison, however, is the only high school in the district with SWS structure, so only students in Harrison's attendance zone have to make a sub-unit choice. The school hosts a freshman night each year to acquaint prospective students and their families with the different sub-units. In the spring, high school counselors visit the feeder junior highs to register 9th graders for their sub-units of choice. Students receive their first choice.

Although both Grant and Harrison rely on articulation with lower grades to group students according to their sub-unit choices, the schools' sub-units differ in the emphasis they place on supporting entering students. One Grant sub-unit sets aside the first ten days of the year to orient students to its program and to assist them in choosing among specially designed course options. In addition, throughout the first year, upper grade sub-unit members join 9th graders in

community-building activities that include celebrations of African-American culture and heritage. In other sub-units, however, sub-unit heads offer little special support to entering students either through community-building activities or curricular offerings. These sub-units, in effect, rely on student attrition to screen out even more students than the selective admissions criteria did. One sub-unit head reported that he admits roughly 30 students for every class and ends up with an average class size of about 24.

Compared to Taylor and Grant, Harrison has a smaller student enrollment and fewer students at risk of failure. Each sub-unit acclimates its incoming students differently. The SWS structure and curriculum allows students to take half of their classes with teachers and students in their sub-unit and the other half with students from other sub-units. To facilitate socialization of new students, one sub-unit partners seniors with sophomores for beginning-of-the year activities that include orientation and a field trip. To varying extents, the interdisciplinary nature of sub-units' curricula builds a sense of sub-unit community. These curricula require students to engage in academic work that shares common themes across classes or in an interdisciplinary project whose components are completed in 2-3 different classes.

Immediate induction into sub-units based on choice and having a transitional emphasis. Adams High School offers five sub-units that serve grades 9-12: Alternative, College Prep, Community, Core Curriculum, and International/Cooperative Learning. Unlike the other three study schools, Adams' sub-units are organized around pedagogical rather than career themes. In both 9th and 10th grades, students take English and social studies classes with other students in their sub-unit. Ninth graders also attend an advisory within their sub-unit. In the 11th and 12th grades, students cross sub-unit boundaries to take courses although the courses and their teachers remain identified to some extent with sub-units. The only feature of the SWS structure that

extends across all four grades is a 6-minute homeroom. Thus, students' sub-unit choices have the most significance for the first two years of high school.

The major purpose of Adams' sub-unit structure is to create smaller, more personable, and manageable groups of students. Sub-unit themes emphasize instructional styles such as cooperative learning, homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping, or student involvement in decision-making. In the absence of curriculum differences and consistent use of alternative instructional strategies however, the sub-units tend to be distinguished more with regard to their histories, reputations for academic success, and social cultures.

Students enter Adams, the only public high school in its district, from one of many K-8 elementary schools. Eighth graders in the city's public as well as private and Catholic schools receive written information about the high school sub-units in December. Representatives of the sub-units also visit the elementary schools to speak to students. Students rank order their sub-unit choices and are accommodated within the constraints of sub-unit size and considerations for balancing student gender, ethnicity, and neighborhood. Two sub-units are regularly oversubscribed, which forces some students to take their second or third choices. An appeals process exists and usually allows vocal parents to gain entry to those two sub-units.

Since the transition from elementary to high school is especially stark, the 9th grade advisory takes a structured form. Students meet in small groups with an advisor every seven days and follow an established curriculum. Curriculum units introduce 9th graders to high school resources and course offerings, take up adolescent issues, and help students plan their class schedules in light of college and career interests. Advisors meet weekly to discuss the students in their sub-unit. Advisories represent the principal means by which Adams staff support students in their first-year and help them make the transition to upper grades.

Social Capital and Identity Formation among Entry-Level Students

Taylor High School. One of two 9th grade sub-unit heads, an African-American working largely with African-American students, framed the importance of social capital for students in these terms:

> *But the child has to, number one, trust you enough to open themselves up for this help. Because a lot of the problem is, the children, they're not really sure who they can trust anymore. So once you establish a relationship with your students that you are really there for them, then you can get a lot accomplished.* (9th grade sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

Her statement suggests that shared ethnicity does not automatically deliver student trust in her. Rather, relationships with students have to be established. According to this administrator, sub-unit staff have succeeded in building unity among themselves, and this enables them to be more effective with students:

> *And we stick together. And I think that's a major issue in being successful. The children know we are here for them and that they know we are a united front. ....* (W)*hen we come together collectively, it's just a strong front. You know we have meetings and we say, "Even if we disagree personally, if our philosophies are different, that's fine. But our joint philosophy is one thing."* (9th grade sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

The administrator's use of the term "united front," however, suggests that an aim of the sub-unit is to gain control over students as opposed to collaborating with them. Students themselves identified few supportive teachers:

> *He's the best teacher. Yeah, that's cuz...I think cuz he feel like if you want to do it, you will do it cuz you want to do it, not cuz he tell you to do it. We doing it cuz he ain't pressuring us to do it. Like all the other teachers. Like the teachers, they act like they don't care. But now like Mr. W., Mr. W. act like he care and we do it. You don't it, he take time and he talk to you. And he make sure you do it. He joke with us and he talk to us.* (Female 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

> *And some teachers in this school treat students like they ain't nobody. Like the teachers are everything. Mr. W. when you go to him, he treat you like you're equal to a teacher.* (Male 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

The discrepancy between what teachers work towards –students' trust- and what students experience represents one challenge of working exclusively with a large number of incoming students who themselves feel challenged by the new school. The other 9th grade sub-unit head framed the challenge in this way:

> *Basically, some of the students who have a poor home life, you know, which ones are we really going to have to get behind? You know, which ones are we going to have to start really helping and supporting immediately? Because some of these kids get lost before you even get to them. I mean, when you've got 700 students coming in that you've never seen.... It's a little easier in the upper levels because they're only getting a handful of ...10th graders.* (9th grade sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

The demands of teaching students new to the school are great and made the 9th grade sub-units an unattractive teaching assignment. According to the first sub-unit head:

> *The 9th grade year every year experiences a very large turnover in teachers. And every year we have, I would probably say, the most new teachers. And I think 9th grade should have more experienced teachers because the 9th grade is where you need more structure.* (9th grade sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

Staff viewed 9th graders as a group in negative terms. Staff leaders viewed them as lacking needed attributes:

> *...9th graders do not have the skills, either socially, especially socially, or academically. But most is socially, because they don't know how to interact successfully with one another without getting into a conflict situation. So it takes about ten months to show them or teach them how to function in a high school because they come in with behaviors that are totally out of order for high school.* (9th grade sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

Yet middle school teachers view their 8th graders as the most mature. This raises questions about how much of the problem 9th grade teachers confront is attributable to the students rather than the situation. Ninth graders described a social situation that was difficult in the first months but eventually improved. One student said:

> *When I first came here, I didn't like it. But after a couple ... after a couple months it'll sort of grow on you. But...you start meeting people. 'Cuz when I first came here I didn't know nobody. At first I didn't like the students cuz they were like, you're from Boston*

> *Get out. Go back to Boston, and stuff like that. But then... then they started... they were... then a couple months later they didn't say that no more.* (Male 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

And if teachers locate the 9th grade problem in the students, students likewise place some of the blame for the situation on the teachers:

> *I didn't like it at first.*
> (Researcher) ***What didn't you like at first?***
> ***Students and teachers.***
> (Researcher) ***What about the students and teachers didn't you like?***
> *They all had attitudes.* (Female 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

> *I didn't even like it at first. But it's all right now. It depends. Like it depends on who your teacher is how much you learn.* (Female 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

These students adjusted to high school and their sub-unit over time. Some but not others grew to accept the necessity of being separated from students in the upper grades sub-units:

> *I didn't like it at first ... because I knew a whole bunch of people in the upper* (sub-units). (Male 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

> *It's like, the only thing I don't like about* (the sub-unit) *is like you can't see the people that you want to see.* (Male 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

> *Cuz if everybody was together, they won't get along. Cuz it's already too many people in our lunch period. It's good that they split us up cuz we're all... it would be too much.* (Female 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

> *It's not a lot of people here. Like she said. ...If there was a bunch of people in here, it would be a lot of stuff, like a lot of chaos everyday. Something new would be happening everyday. But now that is split up.* (Male 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

While they adjusted to the 9th grade sub-unit, they did not view it favorably, especially as compared to the upper sub-units:

> *Really I can't wait to get out of the* (sub-unit) *but, um, yeah, if we go on to a other* (upper sub-unit) *I think you're getting more done. Cuz like if you go into the different* (upper sub-units) *over there, I mean, you can go through the hallway and won't hear nothing. Everybody be doing their work. One or two people be in the hallway playing around but*

over here, somebody, oh no...(Female 9th grade student, 9th grade sub-unit, Taylor High School)

To some 9th graders, dividing students into small groups has value, but it is carried out at the costs of making just one transition and connecting with older, successful students who are identified by their career interests rather than deficiencies. A senior reflected on the 9th grade situation:

> ... *I really didn't like the fact of the* (9th grade sub-units) *because you're coming out of middle school and then to be with the same people you were in middle school..., then get adjusted when you're in 10th grade. .... But I think that they should have had just all the* (upper sub-units) *and your 9th grade choose where you want so you can get adjusted and be with everybody. That way, you can have a more pleasant four years of high school. Because ... if you're with a mixture of a more older group of kids and they're doing the right thing and you're young and you don't know what you're doing, you're going to want to do what the older kids do. But when you're in* (9th grade sub-units) *and you're with the 9th graders, you're going to want to do what the goof-offs do.* (Female 12th grade student, Taylor High School)

The staff's recent attempts to improve the 9th grade sub-units' effectiveness fall short of what this senior wanted. Ninth grade students who fail courses and have to repeat them are no longer kept in the 9th grade sub-units but placed in the upper academies to eliminate a major source of the discipline problems in the 9th grade sub-units. Staff also created all-male and all-female classes.

Taylor 9th graders' adjustment to high school involves a process of meeting new people and deciding which teachers and peers support one's interests and which do not. Students form opinions over time about which teachers care about them and help them learn. They do the same in regard to peers. One student reflected on this process from the vantage point of her senior year:

> *I changed because I have a girlfriend that I was with in the 9th grade. ... I love her dearly, ...but you have to let people go sometimes if that's not what you want to do. .... I mean ...she's making it, but she's supposed to have graduated like maybe a year ago,... she's almost 20 years old, and she's still here. And, um, I mean, it's just, it's all about ...*

you have to see where you want to go in life, and then again, when you start advancing, you start meeting new people and different friends, and you let your old friends go. (Female 12th grade student, Arts/Humanities sub-unit, Taylor High School)

Ninth graders' determination of who one is or wants to become in high school seems limited to a dichotomous decision about whether or not to take schoolwork seriously. By design, opportunities to build an identity around one's interests and future plans are deferred until the end of the 9th grade.

Grant High School. Grant serves a student population that closely resembles Taylor's in size, ethnicity, and social class, but its SWS structure if not always its practice differs. Ninth graders take classes in the same physical area of the building as the 10th-12th graders in their sub-unit. Many of these students enter with poor academic skills, however, and student behavior and, to varying degrees, staff instability are serious problems at the 9th grade level in the sub-units. As a result 9th graders do not participate in many of the sub-unit's special program features until they reach higher grade levels. Consequently, 9th graders are not excluded from the career-based sub-units but neither are they full embraced by them.

The Health sub-unit illustrates how social capital and identity formation play out under these conditions. As at Taylor, the 9th grade level in the Health sub-unit represents *"almost a weeding out process."* Health sub-unit teachers view many 9th graders as lacking maturity. Under some pressure from teachers of 10th grade courses, 9th grade teachers are careful not to pass on students who are *"just not ready for the 10th grade."*

The 9th graders who are serious about school seem to draw the same distinctions between 9th grade students as teachers do:

Like some of the kids be enrolled but like they don't even come to school, then when they come back they cut and are in the hallways. (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

> *You know how other students have been trying to get into the school that are really interested? And it's like you have to wait like on a waiting list. So every year it's just not, they'll be, just to be around taking up space instead of a student that really wants to come here and learn. So they are the ones that come here and just want to lollygag.* (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

They also appear to appreciate teachers' efforts to manage less serious students:

> *He separates the class, the bad from the good students. The ones that want to work and the ones that don't want to work. So he'll write up the ones that don't and they'll have to make it up after school. So instead of wasting our class time trying to get, to deal with the ones that are not, the teachers work with us.* (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

On a day-to-day basis, inside and outside of classes, serious students have to negotiate their way around their less serious classmates. At the same time, however, 9th graders at Grant can identify within their sub-unit the students who have advanced to the upper grades. One student articulated the value of this for her:

> *I guess I like the* (sub-unit) *because ... you see successful people in it. Like ... 12th graders and stuff, you see a whole bunch of people that are going to college. .... You see a lot of progress-making in the* (sub-unit). (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

As at Taylor, 9th grade students in the Health sub-unit name quite a few teachers they do not like relative to those they do. However, there are some important differences. At Grant, the teachers that students like are usually connected with the sub-unit's Health theme. A 9th grader described her health science teacher, one that several students mentioned as their favorite teacher in the sub-unit, in these terms:

> *He talks on a kid level like we talk to each other. And that's how we get everything that he teaches. Now don't get me wrong, he don't talk like that ... so that well oh I'm a teacher, they'll love me. He'll be a teacher, but ...he's got a good student-teacher relationship.* (Female 9th grader, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

Ninth graders are also enthusiastic about the sub-unit head who teaches courses in the sub-unit as well as has responsibility for program coordination and student discipline. The sub-unit head is as likely to interact with students around curriculum-related matters as discipline:

> *She's, she's real understanding about like that if people don't have computers at home and you have to print out something, she'll let you go in there print it or type it up. She'll help because she's a teacher too. And she'll help you with your paper too.* (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

In the case of the health science teacher and sub-unit head, teachers can respond to students' personal concerns in the context of the academic program thereby increasing students' connection to the sub-unit. In contrast, sub-unit heads at Taylor do not teach and interact with students mostly around discipline:

> *...I would say the major responsibility in 9th is the discipline issue. You know, my job description does cover other duties, but my major duty, which is almost all day everyday, is discipline.* (9th grade sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

In the latter arrangement, 9th grade student identity is defined mostly by good/bad behavior rather than by sub-unit affiliation.

As described previously 9th graders in the Health sub-unit at Grant also define themselves in relation to the good/bad student dichotomy but have other identifications as well. The common denominator of the several reasons they gave for electing to attend Grant is an interest in health careers:

> *I came here because of the ... Health* (sub-unit) *because I want to be a mortician. And my aunt graduated from here and well.... A couple of years ago she told me that this would be a good place. They had a whole bunch of different scholarships and stuff. And summer activities with people who, like, go work in a morgue and stuff like that.* (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

> *I came here because I wanted to be a pediatrician and stuff. And I didn't want to go to my neighborhood high school because uh, because all my friends would be here and stuff at* (other school). *So my grandmother said that I had to go to* (this school) to meet new people. (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

Although 9th graders have little health-related coursework, they participate in other thematic activities. One student reported that "*I like that every other week we go to a hospital and try and help people.*" (Male 9th grader, Health sub-unit, Grant High School), and the student who wanted to be a mortician got to visit a morgue.

Ninth graders in the Health sub-unit identify an interest in the health field, an interest that distinguishes them even from their best friends:

> (Researcher) *Now in your middle school, how many kids do you know came from your middle school to here?*
> *Maybe about a good 30-40.*
> (Researcher) *And did they come into the Health* (sub-unit) *too?*
> *No, it was just me, and everyone else went to* (another sub-unit).
> ....
> (Researcher) *What do you do, for example, after school? Do you hang out with people from* (the Health sub-unit)?
> *No, from* (another sub-unit).
> (Researcher) .... *Why is that?*
> *'Cause those are my close friends.* (Female 9th grade student, Health sub-unit, Grant High School)

This student's decision to opt for a sub-unit other than the one her close friends chose suggests that the career themes are strong attractions and afford the opportunity for 9th graders to begin to explore their identity apart from what they may share with family and friends.

Harrison High School. Harrison High School's SWS organization resembles Grant's quite closely; each sub-unit is organized around all grade levels and a career/subject area theme. Harrison also differs from Grant in several respects. Most notably, Harrison serves a smaller student population, most of whom are working class, and only one-third is African-American and Hispanic combined. Further, the failure rate among the entering class of sophomores is not as great as that at Grant although about three-quarters of entering sophomores read below grade level and problems of school transition are evident: Harrison teachers view entering sophomores

as immature, and a larger proportion of sophomores receive failing grades than 9th graders in this district.

Stronger than the perceived differences between sophomores and older students is staff's and students' perception of shared curricular interests and characteristics among members of Harrison's sub-units. As at Grant, incoming students at Harrison sort themselves into sub-units on the basis of these interests:

> *Basically the choice that you could take was what interested you, what you wanted to do. Or like if you have like some –like I chose* (Arts/Humanities) *cause I'm an artist. I like to –I draw all the time so it was something that I could do and get better at so that was why I chose that one.* (Male 10th grade student, Arts/Humanities, Harrison High School)

> *I chose* (this sub-unit), *you know, because I like to work with my hands. And they told us that we'd get to build go-carts and stuff, and that's the kind of things I like to do. When I saw* (this sub-unit), *since they got more practical work, I chose it. 'Cause I like doing practical work. I like building cars and telling about all its problems.* (Male 11th grade student, Science/Technology, Harrison High School)

What Harrison's entering students find in their sub-units to a greater extent than Grant's entering students, however, is a sub-culture that has grown up around these interests. School staff and students referred frequently to the different character and identity of the four sub-units. The Science/Technology sub-unit head at Harrison observed that:

> *it's interesting to see how kids gravitate towards different schools and how schools as they come on board and develop take on their different personalities. And you can pretty much say that's an* (Arts/Humanities) *kid, that's a* (Science/Technology) *kid, that's a* (Health/Human Services) *kid.* (Science/Technology sub-unit head, Taylor High School)

Students' reasons for liking the sub-unit they had chosen include references to their identification with the sub-unit's culture or way of doing things. A 10th grader backed up his reasons for choosing Arts/Humanities by pointing out that:

> *There's a lot of personality in* (Arts/Humanities) *where it's different than like the more technical* (sub-unit). *You'll find more couches and stuff in* (Arts/Humanities), *or a lot of kids laying on their stomachs doing their work on the floor, or cross-legged sitting somewhere.* (Male 10th grade student, Arts/Humanities, Harrison High School)

Similarly, Science/Technology students who want the opportunity to work with their hands are also allowed to move about and help other students as a routine feature of their classwork. A 10th grader, just a few weeks into the school year, explained how it worked:

> *It helps because like those people that I was working with in math, they help me on stuff that I don't understand. Like today, if they don't understand something then I can help them and we can also like talk while we're doing it. And in woodshop, I help people out. They get to know me and I get to know them.* (Male 10th grade student, Science/Technology, Harrison High School)

Their comments suggest that students begin to forge an identity around what they are good at and how they like to work in their first year of high school. Of course, students in any school may encounter the occasional teacher or class with which they particularly resonate. The difference at Harrison is that students come together with both teachers and peers from the first year on to validate, reinforce, and cultivate each others' interests and personal styles.

As at Grant, students' choice of a sub-unit that matches their interests often leads to forging an identity apart from their close friends. As the 10th grade Science/Technology student indicated above, identity formation and meeting new friends occur in a reciprocal fashion. For this student, too, making new friends does not replace his other older, friends whom he sees at lunchtime but not in his classes:

> *They're in different* (sub-units), *and only a few are in* (Science/Technology). *And they have separate classes.* (Male 10th grade student, Science/Technology, Harrison High School)

At an early point in this student's transition to high school, he appears not so much to be shedding an old identity and gaining a new one but rather to be constructing a more complex one. The ability to begin to construct a more complex identity from the first year in high school was crucial to the following Arts/Humanities senior's "turnaround":

> *Jeff and I are friends. And he just found out this year that, my sophomore year I was horrible child. I got brought home by the police, I dealt drugs, I did drugs, I skipped 135 classes, which nobody would expect of me now. Well, see, because we're friends like this, you know, it's not going to affect –what I did then or what I've done. They don't say, "Well, you were a bad person, you were evil." I came here and people really want to get to know you. They really want to be your friend...and the turnaround happened around junior year. You're kind of forced to like people because you see them every period.* (Female 12th grade student, Arts/Humanities, Harrison High School)

Both students give Harrison's SWS structure a role in the process from the first year of high school. This contrasts with Grant High School where first year students also entered sub-units comprised of peers with shared interests. Consistent with the weaker sub-unit program found at this level at Grant, its first years students supplied fewer such accounts of making new friends through the force of their sub-unit's structure and culture.

Adams High School. Adams serves a very diverse community, more students of affluent families than the other schools in our study sample, but also many students of poor, immigrant families. Adams also has the longest history of SWS organization and school choice of our study schools. The district employs special mechanisms to help parents and students select a sub-unit.

Somewhat surprisingly then, the organization of most sub-units is limited to the 9th and 10th grade level and to English and social studies courses within these grade levels. Sub-units do not have a career or subject area focus, rather each emphasizes a particular instructional style such as cooperative learning. Students actually experience such teaching styles to the extent that the sub-unit teachers subscribe to these styles and only in the courses that are organized within the sub-unit.

Students and staff described these limited programmatic differences between the sub-units:

(Student) *It matters for freshmen and sophomore year mostly. ...Yeah, in terms of classes and stuff. Well, it doesn't matter in anything else, does it?* (Male 11th grade student, International/Cooperative Learning sub-unit, Adams High School)

(Administrator) *...after the 9th and 10th grade which is kind of basic, you can go where the hell you want to go. It doesn't make any difference.* (Sub-unit) *has absolutely no bearing, really, after the 10th grade because there is so much crossover, you know.* (Administrator, Adams High School)

To the 9th and 10th grade classes that are organized within sub-units students ascribed distinctive teaching and disciplinary practices:

Our core classes, for example, are based on discussions not writing a lot or like a lot of tests. It's about doing group work, meeting friends, and, uh, helping each other. (Male 9th grade student, International/Cooperative Learning sub-unit, Adams High School)

They don't even get detention in (Alternative). (Male 10th grade student, College Prep sub-unit, Adams High School)

(Core) *'s supposed to be the seriously strict* (sub-unit) *and that's that* (sub-unit) *that I was like, "I'm not going in that one, it's too strict for me.* (College Prep) *'s perfect." But I've come to find that* (College Prep) *right now is probably more stricter than all the* (sub-units). (Many students agree with "yes" and "that's right." (Female 11th grade student, College Prep sub-unit, Adams High School)

Besides pedagogical differences, what distinguishes the sub-units is their academic reputation and differences in student ethnicity and social class. Students described the differences:

I mean I don't like falling into stereotypes, but like, a lot of kids are attracted to (Core) *cause it's like the parents' thing like, it goes through the parents' head, "OK, well I know my kid isn't like the smartest kid and maybe like the big academic push it would really stressful for them, and I don't want to put them through that. So I'm going to put them in a house like* (Core) *where all their friends are going to be* (Male 9th grade student, College Prep sub-unit, Adams High School)

(College Prep) *is supposed to be* (several students interrupt and shout) *"the smart* (sub-unit)." (Several students, College Prep sub-unit, Adams High School)

There are a lot of (section of city) *upper middle class people in* (Alternative). (Male 11th grade student, International/Cooperative Learning sub-unit, Adams High School)

Teachers spoke of the differences in similar terms:

The average (sub-unit) *gets maybe 15% or 16% kids with ed plans, and I'm up as high as 38% sometimes.* (Teacher, Community sub-unit, Adams High School)

They call the (Community) *and math corridor that no one wants to teach on,* (23rd) *Ave. I live right next to it, and* (23rd) *Ave. is all Afro-American kids from the elementary schools down there and they choose to come up there and they get a much higher minority Afro-American quota in* (Community). (Teacher, International/Cooperative Learning sub-unit, Adams High School)

Well, for a while I thought we were becoming (elite women's college) *because white girls tended to pick this* (sub-unit) *more than anybody in the last two years.* (Teacher, Alternative sub-unit, Adams High School)

Sub-units do not actively seek higher-achieving students, but some have inadvertently done so through pedagogical practices that appeal to parents of high achievers. Once sub-units became differentiated by social and ethnic differences, students' reasons for selecting a particular sub-unit were based mostly on social identifications:

Well, my sister was in (International/Cooperative Learning), *so she said it was cool, so I said, "OK."* (Male 10th grade student, International/Cooperative Learning sub-unit, Adams High School)

(You're talking about all the kids kind of go where they think they fit in?) *Exactly!* (Female 10th grade student, College Prep sub-unit, Adams High School)

My brother was in (College Prep), *but my parents really wanted me to go there.* (College Prep) *has this reputation of being the most academic, and my parents like are into that and whatever. But I liked hearing about* (International/Cooperative's) *philosophies more, because I like working with other people. Their philosophy is like group work or something and sort of having a lot of mixed classes with people. And stuff like that. And that's like where I went to elementary school. And I liked that. .... And my friends from grammar school, and most of my friends were all heading over there too.* (Female 10th grade student, International/Cooperative learning sub-unit, Adams High School)

Staff, too, understood that sub-unit selection rested on student's social identifications:

It has to do with peers. (Administrator, Adams High School)

And kids, teenagers, want to be with their friends. I mean, I think that's what the driving force is. (Teacher, College Prep sub-unit, Adams High School)

> (According to) *a study of schools of choice, and one of the most important findings for me was that people are choosing to be in programs where there are others like themselves, and that certainly has been the case here.* (Academic department head, Adams High School)

The choice to follow siblings and friends into a sub-unit contrasts sharply with what we observed at Grant and Harrison where incoming students choose sub-units most often on the basis of subject and career interests even if their friends choose other sub-units. At Grant, students share ethnicity and social class with peers irrespective of any sub-unit choice they make. Further, students in both Harrison and Grant enter high school from junior high and middle schools and have more experience negotiating large, diverse student bodies. Compared to students at these two schools, Adams students have more reason to choose sub-units on the basis of social similarity.

Students generally did not comment about getting to know and bonding with peers through their sub-unit's 9th grade level advisory and English/social studies block. An exception to this were the students in the International/Cooperative Learning sub-unit where the blocked classes, according to the student above, involve *" doing group work," "meeting friends," and "helping each other"* among other things. Another student commented that

> *Like around my locker, there's many cultures, ...Bangladesh, ... Spanish-speaking, ... Haitians..... ...I communicate with everybody, and ... you have to take advantage of that. That's what an* (International/Cooperative Learning) *person is.* (Male student, International/Cooperative Learning, Adams High School)

These students' comments suggest that social capital and identity formation go hand in hand in the International/Cooperative Learning sub-unit as they often do at Harrison. Indeed, as another student above indicated, it is a process for some students that has its origin in a feeder elementary school also devoted to cooperative learning.

According to other students and staff, the process of clarifying and pursuing one's interests begins after the initial year or two of high school. One student described the purpose of the blocked classes:

> *I think it's to get kids adjusted to the system and to have them be comfortable in their own school. And I think after that they'll realize that you've found your interests and you'll go your own path.* (Female 11th grade student, College Prep sub-unit, Adams High School)

As at Taylor High School, the special 9th grade advisory and blocked classes as described here serve to facilitate transition to high school after which point students are ready to exercise meaningful choice in their education. At Adams, staff prepare students not to make informed sub-unit choices but choices in schoolwide course offerings.

Identity-making in relation to educational matters involves two transitions at Adams as it does at Taylor except where staff in some of Adams' sub-units tried to create a degree of continuity across grade levels. Unlike Taylor, Adams students find structural support for such identity-making in the entry year but much less in the upper grades. At entry when students' desire to be with socially similar peers enters into their sub-unit choice, this structural support contributes to identity formation that, according to an Adams teacher and parent, *"seems like this horrible, self-selecting, social economic thing"* even as it serves adolescent *"empowerment."*

Conclusions

In this study our interest has been in examining social capital and identity formation among entry level students in SWS high schools. Research has shown transition to high school poses special problems for students, and we have documented some of the challenges entering students face as well as pose to staff and SWS reforms in particular. Different study schools respond in different ways to these challenges, and their responses have varying implications for

social capital and identity formation. SWS organization has long been touted as a strategy for enhancing the social context of schooling. Our evidence indicates that SWS structure enhances teacher-student and peer relationships and highlights the importance of entering students' relationships with advanced students. Further, the study describes the potentially valuable role that SWS structure may play in student identity formation as well as the critical interplay of social capital with identity formation.

Negative Identity Formation in a Separate Entry-Level Sub-Unit

Staff in only one SWS high school we studied, Taylor High School, created a separate sub-unit to meet students' transitional needs. Taylor's self-contained 9th grade sub-units employed both organizational and curricular mechanisms to accommodate entering students' special academic and social needs. The concentration of these students' problems in a separate unit, however, and the existence of more attractive, career-based sub-units in the upper grades created a negative identity for the 9th grade sub-units. Teachers did not welcome the assignment, and staff instability created additional problems. Entering students "adjusted" to their sub-unit but also viewed it unfavorably.

In effect, the 9th grade sub-units took the form of pull-out categorical programs whose goal is to assess and remediate students' academic deficits and then return them to the mainstream, in this case, 10th grade. Like some categorical programs, the 9th grade sub-units fail to eliminate many students' academic deficits in one year, and where to place repeater classes of students becomes yet another problem. A third parallel with many categorical programs is that the 9th grade sub-units stigmatize 9th graders whom staff perceive as immature relative to advanced students. Although the sub-units are organized to allow teachers and students to get to

know each other better, teacher instability and the untouched teacher-student ratio maintained a climate of student control as opposed to collaboration.

A major rationale for Taylor's 9th grade sub-units is to prepare students to choose a career-based sub-unit in the upper grades. School staff did not create or rely on any middle to high articulation mechanisms to prepare students for this prior to high school. As a consequence, entering students have no choice in their school program and no benefit of affiliation with teachers and students who share their interests. Since the 9th grade sub-units are designed to make students school-worthy in the upper grades, entering students' choices are programmatically limited to taking school seriously or not. Like Wexler's (1992) insights about identity formation among African-American students in an inner city school, many Taylor 9th graders struggled against a negative identity to distinguish themselves as worthy sometimes through aligning themselves with teachers and peers who cared about them.

Enhanced Social Capital and Identity Formation in Subject Area/Career-Based Sub-units

When students choose career-based sub-units in the first year, as they do at Grant and Harrison, they may gain transitional benefits through enhanced social capital and identity formation. At Grant and Harrison, entering students have the opportunity to build identifications with interests and with staff and students who share those interests, especially students who have succeeded in advancing to higher graders. Educational choices that enhance students' identity and social support are also likely to increase students' maturity and sense of control and lead to more responsible choice-making in the future. By contrast, Taylor's 9th grade sub-units emphasize teacher-centered practices intended to *teach* maturity over strategies that allow students to gain maturity through *acting* in more mature ways.

To be sure, while Taylor's 9th grade sub-units exist at a cost to social capital and identity formation among 9th graders, they benefit the sub-units in the upper grades. Grant staff seek to reduce stress on their sub-units caused by 9th graders' behavior and academic failure by not investing heavily in the 9th grade-level program as Taylor does and allowing in effect for some student attrition to occur and/or holding marginally successful 9th graders back. They also recruit higher achieving students from the community.

But countering the lack of special supports for entering students somewhat are the benefits they accrue from pursuing their curriculum interests even to a limited degree and having successful peer role models in their sub-units. Grant 9th graders appear to pick their way through troublesome peers and teachers they do not like as Taylor students do. The difference is that the teachers and activities Grant students like are those that have the capacity to respond to their declared interests.

The benefits to entering students of a sub-unit structure differentiated by curriculum themes and inclusive of all grade levels seemed most full realized at Harrison. Within Harrison's sub-units, entering students expressed strong identifications with their sub-unit's curricular specialties and sub-culture. Their accounts of getting to know and like individuals they would not likely have met outside their sub-unit were striking. Harrison students provided evidence that at entry level students begin to develop a more complex set of identifications: they make new friendships based on shared interests even as they retain old friends; they mature into more responsible individuals but find acceptance for past behavior.

Role of Student Diversity in Social Capital and Identity Formation in Sub-units that Emphasize Transition

At Adams, students make two transitions, initially into their sub-unit, and then again out into the mainstream in 11th grade. Students and staff view the upper grades as the time to pursue their individual interests through schoolwide course offerings. In these ways the experience of entering students at Adams roughly parallels that of Taylor students. However, Adams 9th graders enter sub-units of their choice. For this reason social capital and identity formation play out differently for them than for students who are assigned to Taylor's 9th grade sub-units.

Students' sub-unit choices at Adams are associated with the consolidation of identities based on the pedagogical preferences and social class and ethnicity shared among sub-unit members. Students often make sub-unit choices that allow them to preserve friendship groups made in elementary school. In this very diverse city, elementary schools organized around some of the same pedagogies and social class distinctions found at Adams help to establish some of these identifications. Moreover, students' shift from small, neighborhood elementary schools to a large high school makes educational choices that offer social similarity especially compelling. This is most likely to be the case when sub-units lack the subject area or career themes that proved so attractive to entering students in the other two study schools.

The 9th grade blocked classes and advisory did not appear to be a powerful mechanism for student-student bonding perhaps because they were limited to two periods a day (advisory occurred every seven days). There were exceptions, however; and they were the sub-unit classes whose pedagogical philosophy promoted students' getting to know and interact with each other.

Summary

Social capital and identity formation appear to be mutually enhancing processes. School sub-units that generate social capital in the context of responding positively to students' identity-seeking enhance its value; favorable relationships among teachers and students reinforce

students' interests. The interplay of social capital and construction of a positive identity appears to have particular importance for students during the transition to high school. Research on SWS organization has examined SWS structure in relation to students' social relationships (for example, Oxley, 1997) but not identity. Our study suggests that SWS organization has a critical role to play in both the formation of social capital and positive student identity.

While social capital and identity formation appear to be important to students' adjustment to high school, many other factors play a role as well. We did not examine other factors such as instructional effectiveness and do not wish to imply that schools that favorably influence social capital and identity formation are effective in general. In addition, the study schools differ in highly significant ways, and we do not wish to imply that strategies in one school would operate in the same way in another school under different conditions. On the contrary, our study suggests that school reforms must be responsive to these local conditions.

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Table 1: Summary Information for SWS High Schools Included in Analysis

	Taylor	Grant	Harrison	Adams
Number of Students	2300	2600	1300	1900
Grade levels	9-12	9-12	10-12	9-12
Location	Inner-city	Inner-city	Medium city	Medium city
% Minority Students	69%	99%	30%	61%
Socio-economic status	Poor	Poor	Working class	Working class/ mixed
Number of sub-units	5	5	4	5
Transition Strategy	Separate 9th grade sub-unit	Immediate induction into sub-units of choice	Immediate induction into sub-units of choice	Immediate induction into sub-units of choice with transitional emphasis
Generic names of sub-units	Arts/Humanities Business Health/ Human Services Mechanical/ Aeronautical 9th grade sub-units	Arts Business Communications Health Law/ African-American	Arts/Humanities Internat'l Business Health/ Human Services Science/ Technology	Alternative College Prep Community Core Curriculum Internat'l/ Cooperative Learning

Appendix

Description of the Larger Study: SWS High Schools, Their Sub-units, and Research Methods

Description of the Study SWS High Schools

For readers interested in more detail about our study sites, we provide a brief descriptive "portrait" for each school. We structure the descriptions to present each school's unique qualities (the first aim described by Patton [1990]). The shared patterns (the second aim) are presented in the Results section. Although our school descriptions are necessarily brief, we acknowledge a debt to Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's (1983) "portrait" approach. Lightfoot "recognized that it was important for readers to place these high schools in context: visualize the terrain, the community, the neighborhood streets, and the people" (p.22). Because our data collection extended over two school years, we describe the schools as they were in Spring 1999. However, several of schools experienced substantial change between then and our second round of data collection six months later (Fall 1999).

- John Quincy Adams High School. Adams is the only public high school in its New England city, although there are several Catholic and elite private schools. School choice has a long history in this economically, racially, and ethnically diverse city, which has contributed to substantial differences in philosophy, pedagogy, and demographics among the city's 15 public elementary (K-8) schools. Choice is also an important element within the high school. Elementary schools often direct their students to Adams sub-units with similar philosophies. The SWS structure began with two alternative schools during the 1970s – one with a highly structured curriculum and the other patterned on the "open school" philosophy. At that time there were also two regular high schools in the city, one focused on academics and the other on vocational training. The city, to avoid a potential desegregation suit, folded the several schools into one high school, organized as one of the first SWS schools in the country. Even though entry into the current sub-units occurs under a choice program that takes into account racial, gender, and residential balance, over time the sub-units have become stratified – by both social, racial, and academic background. The school is currently planning a substantial change in its structure, although choice and the SWS design will remain. Important in this change is the new principal, who took charge in Fall 1999.

- Ulysses S. Grant High School. This all-black high school's academic and social reputation has improved considerably in the last few years. It still suffers, however, from many problems that plague inner-city schools: high absentee and dropout rates, high rates of course failure, and many students retained in grade (due to insufficient credits). Though the student population is over 2,500 in the fall, dropouts and transfers reduce the number by 500-700 students over the course of the year. The central office in this mid-Atlantic city (including the superintendent) is committed to organizing all of the city's schools (elementary, middle, and secondary) into small learning communities. Students, who apply to Grant from every corner of the city, are free to choose among all regular public high schools as well as to apply to several "exam" schools. Students apply directly to sub-units, rather than to the schools in which they are located, and some of Grant's sub-units actively recruit students from middle schools with good reputations. Application rates vary considerably among sub-units based upon their reputations. All sub-units are permitted to screen out students with extremely low attendance and achievement records, although applicants from the school's own attendance zone are accepted automatically. Two sub-units are career academies; two others began with some foundation support for small learning communities, and one is a magnet school that was part of the city's original desegregation plan. U.S. Grant High School also has a new principal, as of Fall 1999.

- Benjamin Harrison High School. One of four high schools in its Northwest district, Harrison is distinguished from the other district high schools in several ways: it is the only school with an SWS structure, it enrolls the most economically and racially diverse clientele, and is has the district's lowest test scores. Students must attend the high school in their catchment area. Currently, there is considerable conflict over the SWS organizational structure between administration and staff. The administration, under pressure to raise test scores and unable to defend the SWS structure on the basis of them, is pursuing other programs (such as an International Baccalaureate [IB] magnet) in the hopes of attracting high-ability students to the school. Many teachers, on the other hand, are staunch supporters of SWSs and would prefer resources to go toward

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strengthening the existing structure. SWS staff in some sub-units have participated in interdisciplinary teaming on a regular basis for several years and offer theme-based curricula and/or integration of vocational and academic subjects. Because the principal plans to retire at the end of the 1999-2000 school year, the future of the school's SWS organization may hinge on who is chosen to lead the school.

- James Monroe High School. Located in a Southwest city whose mostly Hispanic population is growing fast, Monroe opened in a new building five years ago. From the outset, this attractive school was designed architecturally around the SWS structure. Monroe's principal was given free reign to design the school and recruit staff. It began with Grades 7-9, and these same students have progressed together since then. In Fall 1999 the school enrolled its first new 9th graders, although several students have transferred in over this period. The Class of 2000 will be Monroe's first graduates. Besides its uniqueness in our study for its SWS-specific architecture, Monroe is distinct in another way. Two sub-units are magnet programs that attract students from around the city, one of which has selective entrance criteria organized around a rigorous math/science program. Admission to the other two "generic" sub-units is random; these sub-units enroll all students who don't select the magnet programs but live in the city's catchment area. The majority of students are in the generic sub-units, which are considerably larger than the magnets. The principal is young and charismatic. When or if he moves up the organizational ladder, leadership may be a problem.

- Zachary Taylor. This large "zoned" high school in another mid-Atlantic city (about 200 miles from Grant) had the distinction, five years ago, of being declared the second-worst high school in the state. Almost everyone agreed that Taylor was "out of control" at that time. As a result, the school was reconstituted and the career-academy structure was born. Staff from a local university, who were very active in helping with Taylor's reorganization, conducted research to document a considerable improvement in the school's behavioral climate (although absenteeism, dropping out, and course failures are still high). Although the majority of Taylor students are black (very few Hispanics), this is the most racially diverse regular high school in a city with many public schools with selective entrance criteria. Unique in our study is Taylor's decision to isolate 9th graders into a separate academy (now two 9th-grade academies). Almost every year since reconstitution, Taylor has changed principals (not always by choice). However, the same principal has been at the helm for the last two years. Although the academy structure seems solidly in place, their considerable autonomy shortly after reorganization is being constrained and academic departments have been reintroduced. The pressure to raise test scores drives many decisions at Taylor.

Description of Sub-Units in the SWS High Schools

John Quincy Adams High School

- Alternative: Conceived two decades ago by faculty at a local university, Alternative's structure is quite different from a traditional high school. Although state-mandated testing now compels Alternative to align its curriculum, the curriculum still includes African-American literature and women's studies. Beyond the alternative curriculum, progressive pedagogical techniques are common. All Alternative members attend sub-unit retreats that inspire community discourse through student-led discussions of such sub-unit-specific policies as students' calling teachers by their first names, hiring teachers directly to the sub-unit rather than the school, reluctance to assign detention or issue passes to enter or exit class, and self-directed learning activities. Such policies lend Alternative a reputation as a home for slackers, but this is disputed by members. Alternative restricts enrollment, so that is smaller than other Adams sub-units.

- College Prep: This sub-unit focuses on academic achievement and boasts of its tracking policy. College Prep's reputation has become quite strong, based on its students' success in admission to selective colleges and on high test scores. This reputation attracts more students to College Prep than there are places, recently overtaking its closest competitor, Alternative. The sub-unit appeals to serious students (and their parents). College Prep is proud of its reputation in the Adams community as the most academically oriented sub-unit.

- Community: Although Community began as a generic sub-unit within Adams, it adopted a "leadership" theme to distinguish itself and to attract students. Although the sub-unit used to mandate community service, currently

students are only encouraged to engage in such activities. However, the community service curriculum component was never fully developed or supported. This weak theme has contributed to a lack of distinctive identity; most Adams faculty and students consider Community a relatively anonymous sub-unit. One special program within Community receives attention: its 9th and 10th grade core courses keep students together for two years, strengthening its identity. Community enrolls a disproportionate number of minority and low-income students.

- Core Curriculum: This sub-unit began as an option for students and parents who wanted a more traditional and structured high school education than was provided by either the regular high school or by the Alternative sub-unit. Originally housed in a former Catholic school, the Core Curriculum sub-unit came to the main campus twenty years ago. It has tried to maintain its tight-knit community and its reputation for academic rigor. Although other sub-units have overtaken it in terms of academic reputation, today's Core Curriculum students still take most of their courses with their sub-unit. Over time, the sub-unit's prestige as Adams' elite unit has shifted to College Prep.

- International/Cooperative Learning: The ICL sub-unit incorporates progressive pedagogies such as cooperative teaching and an integrated curriculum into its multicultural approach. This sub-unit enrolls all students in the English as a Second Language program (ESL); thus ICL becomes the automatic "choice" for all students who enter Adams with little or no English knowledge (including the unusually high proportion of foreign students at Adams). Despite its reputation as the sub-unit for foreigners, ICL enjoys a high application rate from students who wish an unconventional approach to learning and a chance to broaden their perspective.

Ulysses S. Grant High School

- Arts: Although the Arts sub-unit claims to prepare students for college, the students seem interested in other post secondary opportunities besides higher education. As this sub-unit, like Law/ African-American Culture, has enrolled large numbers of low-achieving students in the past. Its reputation has thus suffered with in the larger school community. Arts students engage in the visual, graphic, and performing arts and pursue courses in music appreciation, architecture, theater, and horticulture. Students participate in dance and theatrical productions as culminating projects. Students are guided towards two "paths" within the sub-unit's curriculum: heritage and the arts process. Faculty may now recruit students outside the feeder region and may apply selective admissions criteria.

- Business: Business faculty and students boast of a community spirit, which may perhaps be tied to the sub-unit's high application rate. Students who enter the sub-unit in the 9th grade remain with a team of teachers and classmates until graduation. The curricular and physical integration with the business department, together with its positive reputation in the district, contributes to high staff stability and student attendance. This long-standing program, which has received special funds from the district, used to apply selective admission criteria. More recently, the superintendent ruled that special funds from outside sources be channeled through the school's regular operating budget. Recently, all sub-units have been allowed to screen applicants, whereas formerly only Business did this. Students pride themselves on the practical life skills they learn from the sub-unit's focus on finance, computer applications, and a general orientation toward business professions. Business faculty actively recruits students from a large number of middle schools outside the feeder school region.

- Communications: Communications began as a district-level magnet program before the other Grant sub-units were established. Like Business, this sub-unit formerly received special funds from the district but now must access these from the school's operating budget. The sub-unit curriculum includes journalism, mass communications, drama, graphic technology, a school TV studio, and computer applications. Students prepare presentations, engage in original research, and refine writing skills. Although Communications' stated intentions are to prepare students for both work and higher education, sub-unit staff encourages students to pursue college. Like Business, Communications staff recruits students from middle schools in the city at large.

- Health: Health claims to prepare its students for either work experience or post secondary education, but the sub-unit strongly emphasizes college as a goal for its students. Its curriculum is problem-based, focused on math and science, and linked to public health and medicine fields. Students have the opportunity to learn

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about diverse career opportunities in the health industry through working with professional at local universities, through shadowing experiences, guest lectures, and internships. These experiences are available mostly in the upper grades. Members of Grant's community Health as one of its most successful sub-units, based on student grades and college acceptances.

- Law/African-American: This sub-unit uses African-American history, literature, culture, and values to foster a tight-knit learning collective in which self-esteem, responsibility, and leadership skills are developed. It added Law to its focus this year. The sub-unit boasts a special program that teaches students to engage in community service as a means to learn about and to improve their world. Faculty aim to accommodate a broad range of students' interests and goals. Law/African-American students are trained (in theory) to enter either work or college after graduation. This sub-unit has experienced high staff turnover and difficulty implementing curricular innovations, in part because of its high proportion of low-achieving students. These difficulties have constrained the sub-unit from realizing many program goals. Its classroom environments are the least conducive of all the Grant sub-units to teaching and learning. Although staff also are now able to recruit students from throughout the district and to use selective criteria in the admissions process, these activities must confront consistently low application and high dropout rates.

Benjamin Harrison High School

- Arts/Humanities: This sub-unit emphasizes the integration of English, social studies, and the arts. Although staff use traditional subject-specific curriculum and assessment methods, they also weave themes across subjects, involve students in developing their own assessment critieria, and engage students in project-based learning. Students write poetry and essays and produce a wide variety of artwork. Students have the reputation of being non-conformists, and the sub-unit is known for its emphasis on artistic and aesthetic values. A/H faculty use themes to cultivate interpersonal sensitivity, respect, and collaboration among students. Faculty in this sub-unit are strong supporters of interdisciplinary collaboration and school-within-school organizational structure at Harrison.

- International Business: This sub-unit offers students a program of applied business practices in an international context. Students learn how to use the Internet and are encouraged to study other languages and cultures. Along with Health/Human Services, Business is considered by its students and faculty as the college preparatory sub-unit, although its graduates are equipped to enter either the workplace or post secondary education. Faculty and students share strong interests in practical business skills and preparation for employment.

- Health/Human Services: The H/HS sub-unit claims to prepare students for careers in health and human services, but the claim has not been realized; very little in the curriculum reflects the career component and theme. The H/HS program presently emphasizes and offers traditional courses in math and science. It is viewed as the sub-unit most resembling a traditional college-preparatory track. We heard that in the past H/HS was characterized by a high level of interdisciplinary collaboration among staff and authentic learning opportunities and projects with health and environmental themes. However, faculty has found it difficult to sustain curriculum integration and project work, so much of it has disappeared. The breadth of topics included within the health and human service domains, coupled with a lack of agreement about how to blend academic and vocational subjects, have diminished interdisciplinary collaboration. Many H/HS faculty continue efforts to pursue this.

- Science/Technology: The Science/Technology sub-unit attracts students interested in mechanical and technological activities. Within Harrison, S/T is the program closest to a traditional vocational education program. Sub-unit faculty work hard to create an integrated learning experience for the sub-unit's students. English and science teachers work quite closely with vocational teachers to blend their courses. Students produce go-carts, paddle boats and rockets as culminating activities. S/T enrolls a disproportionate number of males and low-achieving students, but still retains a student cohort strongly interested in college.

James Monroe High School

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- Generic 1: Students who do not select one of Monroe's magnet programs are randomly assigned to Generic 1 or Generic 2 sub-units. Although Generic 1 started without a specific theme, students and faculty recently developed a theme that represents their ability and drive to attain success, both in school and in their post-graduation plans which may involve work or college. The newly conceived theme has not resonated with many faculty and students, so they still retain a generic character. The sub-unit's curriculum reflects the basic high school program and offers several advanced placement courses. The school accepted new 9th graders for the first time this year, and most of these new students enrolled in Generic 1 or 2.

- Generic 2: The principal characterizes this sub-unit as "still struggling"; its members have not yet developed an theme nor established an identity within the school. No special curriculum or orientation towards college preparation or school-to-work transition exists. Similar to Generic 1, Generic 2 offers the standard high school program and a few advanced placement courses. The two generic programs are defaults for students not interested in business or math/science and enroll the highest number of students.

- International Business Magnet: Students apply to this sub-unit (IBM) from across the school district. Although IBM is not selective, it is similar to the Math/Science Magnet in that the program was developed before Monroe opened. Thus, IBM had a pre-established reputation when Monroe began. The sub-unit's core curriculum, of traditional courses in English and math and of more personalized courses in multicultural issues and business, are designed to instruct students about world cultures and the importance of the Hispanic culture to business. In their mission, IBM claims to prepare students to enter either college or the workforce after graduation.

- Math/Science Magnet: The MSM program was established about five years before James Monroe High opened; thus, their identity of rigorous college preparation particularly in the disciplines of math and science stands out clearly. Students from around the district apply to this program, but the sub-unit has selective entrance criteria and only a small proportion of applicants are admitted. Once students are accepted into MSM, sub-unit faculty claim they work tirelessly to retain the students. The MSM, offers only honors courses, recruits high achieving students from the entire district, and enjoys a disproportionately smaller size than the other sub-units. This selective sub-unit enrolls fewer minority and low income students. Non-MSM students and faculty at Monroe feel that MSM has many special privileges (for example, in terms of teacher hiring and mobility; in resources students access). There is considerable resentment of the special status MSM enjoys.

Zachary Taylor High School

- Arts/Humanities: Taylor has four upper-grade sub-units. Each upper-grade sub-unit provides a college preparatory curriculum along with three or four career pathways. Of the four upper-grade sub-units, Arts/Humanities (A/H) is thought to have the strongest college preparatory focus. Students who transfer to Taylor from academically selective city-wide schools are usually placed in Arts/Humanities. The sub-unit offers four career pathways: computer science, law, visual arts, and cosmetic services. Teachers have a traditional approach to pedagogy: they typically lecture and facilitate some class discussion.

- Business: Faculty describe the business sub-unit as tantamount to a "general" track. Along with a college preparatory curriculum, the sub-unit offers three career pathways: administrative technology (primarily clerical work), marketing, and consumer services or retailing. Many business students participate in apprentice programs sponsored by local merchants as part of their career curriculum. Flags from countries across the world decorate the Business corridor, reminding students of the growing importance of working in a global economy. Pedagogy is traditional, though students also have opportunities to participate in experiential learning projects.

- First-Year 1 & First-Year 2: All of Taylor's incoming 9th graders are randomly assigned to either First-Year 1 or First-Year 2 sub-unit. Each of these sub-units attempts to provide incoming students with a supportive environment in which to develop academic skills, adjust to disciplinary expectations, and select one of four upper-grade sub-units (all have a career focus). During the 9th grade, students complete surveys to identify career interests, take one or more electives in upper-grade academies, and complete a traditional 9th grade curriculum. Teachers are divided into interdisciplinary teams from whom students take the majority of their classes; each team also has primary responsibility for students' attendance and disciplinary problems. When

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Taylor was first organized into SWSs, there was a conscious effort to staff the First-Year sub-units with experienced middle-school teachers. Since then, however, many original faculty members have moved to upper-grade sub-units where students' academic and discipline problems are believed to be less troublesome. New sub-unit faculty are less experienced, further compounding the daily operation of the first-year sub-units.

- Health/Human Services: The H/HS sub-unit offers four curricular pathways: sports training, pharmaceutical technology, emergency medical technician, childcare, and sports studies. This sub-unit is characterized as a home for "jocks", although the sub-unit head is anxious to change this reputation through the introduction of stronger career pathways. Perceptions among younger students at Taylor reflect the sub-unit head's goal; they consider HHS academically rigorous and disciplined. HHS enjoys relatively high attendance in a school where student attendance is an ongoing problem. Pedagogy is traditional, though individual teachers are known innovative instructional practices.

- Mechanical/Aeronautical Engineering: The M/AE sub-unit offers four academic pathways: Airforce ROTC, automotive technology, manufacturing, and drafting. Taylor's ROTC program is city-wide, and students enrolled in ROTC are the most academically oriented students in this sub-unit. Students in the automotive technology pathway participate in apprenticeships with local mechanics (Taylor has few automotive facilities). The atmosphere in sub-unit is suggestive of a traditional high school vocational program. Faculty and students not associated with M/AE characterize its students as undisciplined and academically less skilled. The hands-on curriculum in the sub-unit attracts a disproportionate number of first-year students with academic difficulties.

Methods

Sample Selection

Full-model SWS schools. The study described in this paper is part of a larger field study of high schools divided into schools-within-schools (SWS). We have drawn on the sample and data from the large study for This smaller study. At the outset, we wanted to select five public high schools across the United States that were divided into SWSs. By our definition, in SWS high schools all students (and usually all faculty) are members of only one of several smaller instructional units. These smaller schools are variously labeled "academies," "houses," or "small learning communities;" we call them "sub-units." In what we call "full-model" SWS schools, students typically study all their core subjects within their sub-units. Although the definition seemed clear to us as we began, defining the universe of SWS high schools, the concept was not always clear to our informants. During the early stages of sample selection, we found many high schools that offered one or two SWSs within the larger "regular" school. Other variations on the basic SWS theme are described by Lee, Ready, and Johnson (1999).

Selecting and recruiting schools. We used Michael Q. Patton's recommendations for purposefully sampling information-rich cases within the "maximum variation sampling" strategy to select schools to study (Patton, 1990, p.172). As we did not know what the universe of SWS schools looked like, we conducted a national two-stage telephone survey. We called schools that were recommended to us by several organizations (e.g., the National Association of Secondary School Principals and state departments of education). We also searched the Internet. Once we began to locate schools that fit our requirement for full-model SWSs, we began to ask such schools to recommend other schools with similar structures (Patton's [1990] snowball sampling strategy).

In a first short screening interview with all schools suggested to us, we inquired about school demography, size, location, details of the SWS option, and the proportion of students and faculty in sub-units. We also ascertained the name of a staff contact who was knowledgable about the school's sub-units and whether the school might be interested in participating in research. For most of the schools we contacted, we conducted only the first screening interview. We conducted a second and more extensive interview with the suggested informant in promising schools -- those in which most students and faculty belonged to only one of several SWS sub-units. In these conversations, we elicited details about school operations, membership in sub-units, students' coursework, and the history of SWS organization in that setting.

Through hundreds of telephone calls and an extensive Internet search, we identified 55 full-model SWS high schools around the U.S. In several meetings with the full research team of 11 people, we reduced the list to a smaller number of schools for initial visits. As we planned to study only a few such schools, we sought sample diversity on several dimensions: regional location, history of SWS organization, sub-unit themes, school social and

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academic composition, and physical layout. The project's principal investigator visited several schools we considered in this winnowed group, sometimes with another team member. The final selection of five schools was a group decision. One school that chose not to participate was replaced by another school with similar selection criteria. The sample was purposively selected, to maximize variability along as many dimensions as possible. We excluded schools with the SWS structure in place for fewer than three years. Although we labored to find an SWS school that served a relatively elite school clientele, none of the 55 full-model SWS schools we located had this type of social composition.

Data Collection

School visits. The larger project team was divided into two-person teams (a lead researcher and a research assistant), most assigned to single schools. Each team devoted two week-long visits to "their" school over the course of a calendar year -- in Spring and Fall 1999. The principal investigator also visited each school during teams' two site visits for 1-2 days. A major purpose of the larger study was to investigate how social capital is generated and sustained in high schools divided into schools-within- schools. However, before we could learn about social and academic supports in the school, we needed to focus our attention to learing how schools of this type actually function. Our first visit concentrated on this second purpose.

Before the visits, the lead researcher made contact with a staff coordinator who served as our primary contact. Prior to our first week-long visit, and in consultation with the lead researcher, the staff coordinator helped us by arranging interviews, setting up focus groups with students and teachers, collecting signed consent forms from parents of interviewed students, and scheduling us to attend special events. Our two week-long visits consisted of interviews (school-level, sub-unit level, and some district-level administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and other special staff), focus groups (separately with teachers and students in the sub-units of special focus), shadowing students for at least one day, observations of interactions in hallways and other public locations, attending special events (including athletics) that occurred during our visit, mapping of the physical layout of the building, collecting papers and documents pertinent to school life, and learning about the context in which the school operates.

Focus on two sub-units. As we worried that our data collection schedule would not allow us to learn about the entire school in the depth we hoped for, for the first visit we asked the school to choose two sub-units that we could study in more depth. We requested that one sub-unit be strong and function well, whereas the second sub-unit should be weaker and evidence some problems. During the second week-long visits, we broadened our focus to include all sub-units in the schools. We discovered that some schools' suggestions of sub-units for special focus did not necessarily give us an accurate picture of the school. Although the "stronger" sub-units universally seemed well chosen in light of what we learned about the school, the "weaker" sub-units were not. Schools seemed anxious to showcase the sub-units that function smoothly, but they were less enthusiastic about our studying struggling sub-units. This led us to learn more about all the sub-units during our second visit.

Data forms. During both rounds of data collection, interviews were taped, transcribed verbatim (unless interviewees objected), and verified. Any interviews that were untaped were described in field notes. Although interview data comprise the majority of data from this study, other data include the field notes each researcher wrote about their observations and impressions, and the extensive set of documents supplied to us by the schools. Visiting the schools during two school years allowed us to observe more changes in the school that we would have seen had our data collection been confined to a single school year.

Data Analysis

Case studies. The first step in our data analysis was to create and share case studies of individual schools (Yin, 1994). At the completion of the first round of data collection and processing, each team prepared an extensive case study of "its" school, with information organized around on a common outline developed by the principal investigator. After the second round of data collection, the final case studies were updated and expanded. Issues unique to each school were included, as well as changes in the schools between the first and second visits (there were many). The methodological approach of the "collective case study" helped us identify a conceptual framework and provided us with insight in isolating constructs around which our data analysis was organized. According to Stake, a collective case study is "not a study of the collective, but [rather] an instrumental study extended to several cases" (Stake, 1994, p.237).

Identifying common themes. Between the first and second rounds of data collection, the full team met to discuss our common and unique experiences in the schools. As each team member had read all first-round case

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studies at that point, team members' perspectives began to widen beyond a deep study of one school to a broader study of several. We asked, "What was common across all these SWS schools?" "What is unique in each?" "What themes seem to typify secondary schooling that is organized this way?" At that point, we considered ourselves to be in a good position to identify several themes that had emerged from our study of these schools. The several we identified became targets of data collection in the second round of our study.

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